



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

REGION 4
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April 27, 2010

Mr. Brad Tarr
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
P.O. Box 4970
Jacksonville, FL 32232-0019

Subject: EPA NEPA Comments on COE CERP DEIS for the "Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands Phase 1"; March 2010; Miami-Dade County, FL; CEQ #20100078; ERP #COE-E39080-FL

Dear Mr. Tarr:

In accordance with our responsibilities under Section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Section 309 of the Clean Air Act, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has reviewed the referenced U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE) Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for Phase I of the proposed Biscayne Bay coastal wetland restoration. EPA is a cooperating agency and believes that this proposed project is an important component of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP). We are familiar with this proposed project and have discussed it with the COE (Jacksonville District), National Park Service (Biscayne National Park) and Miami-Dade County (Department of Environmental Resources Management: DERM).

The Biscayne Bay coastal wetlands consist of onshore freshwater wetlands (Biscayne Bay shorelands) and nearshore saltwater wetlands (Biscayne Bay). Over time, this project area has been degraded through canal drainage of freshwater runoff, which has changed the hydroperiod of affected onshore freshwater wetlands and reduced non-point flows into the Bay, which in turn created hypersaline conditions in nearshore Bay waters. The area has further been degraded through point source discharges of freshwater from the canal system into the Bay, which created hyposaline conditions at the point of discharge in nearshore Bay waters.

The Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands Project proposes to restore coastal freshwater wetlands by re-establishing overland flows cut off by the canal system and roadways, through redistribution of that water by a spreader system to rehydrate the 11,000-acre project area. The saltwater wetlands of nearshore Biscayne Bay would also be restored by limiting point source (canal) freshwater discharges into Biscayne Bay. Both actions would help restore Bay salinities to more natural/ambient levels that are more suitable for nursery and other nearshore habitats such as oyster reefs.

The proposed project is to be accomplished in two phases (two separate EISs and Project Implementation Reports: PIRs). The Tentatively Selected Plan identified in the DEIS to implement the present Phase 1 of the project is Alternative O. This alternative would help restore a 3,761-acre footprint through establishing seven pump stations, 10 culverts, three miles of spreader canals, and plugging 2,500 feet of mosquito control ditches.

Comments & Recommendations

EPA strongly supports this proposed project as a CERP water quality, wetland and habitat restoration project. We believe it constitutes a useful first step to accomplishing the project goals within current funding. We recommend the expedited implementation of Phase 1 – as well as prospective Phase 2 to further restore the coastal wetlands of Biscayne Bay. The Final EIS (FEIS) should discuss the availability of sufficient freshwater in the area to rehydrate the onshore wetlands and, accordingly, the feasibility of constructing additional features in the project area targeted for Phase 2.¹

EPA DEIS Rating

Because EPA strongly supports Phase 1 and prospective Phase 2 of the Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands Project, we rate this DEIS as an “LO” (Lack of Objections).

EPA appreciates the opportunity to review the DEIS. Should you have questions regarding these comments, feel free to contact Chris Hoberg of my staff for NEPA issues (404-562-9619 or hoberg.chris@epa.gov) and Eric Hughes of the EPA Water Protection Division (located in the Jacksonville District office) for technical issues (904/232-2464 or Eric.H.Hughes@usace.army).

Sincerely,



Heinz J. Mueller, Chief
NEPA Program Office
Office of Policy and Management

¹ Editorially, we also note from page i that the NEPA public review time for this DEIS was inadvertently listed as 30 days instead of the appropriate 45 days for DEISs. We assume that the COE will provide the additional public review time until the designated 5/3/10 due date.